



Fifty Miles from Tomorrow: A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People

William L. Iggiagruk Hensley

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Nunavut tigummiun!

Hold on to the land!

It was just fifty years ago that the territory of Alaska officially became the state of Alaska. But no matter who has staked their claim to the land, it has always had a way of enveloping souls in its vast, icy embrace.

For William L. Iggiagruk Hensley, Alaska has been his home, his identity, and his cause. Born on the shores of Kotzebue Sound, twenty-nine miles north of the Arctic Circle, he was raised to live the traditional, seminomadic life that his Iñupiaq ancestors had lived for thousands of years. It was a life of cold and of constant effort, but Hensley's people also reaped the bounty that nature provided.

In *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow*, Hensley offers us the rare chance to immerse ourselves in a firsthand account of growing up Native Alaskan. There have been books written about Alaska, but they've been written by Outsiders, settlers. Hensley's memoir of life on the tundra offers an entirely new perspective, and his stories are captivating, as is his account of his devotion to the Alaska Native land claims movement.

As a young man, Hensley was sent by missionaries to the Lower Forty-eight so he could pursue an education. While studying there, he discovered that the land Native Alaskans had occupied and, to all intents and purposes, owned for millennia was being snatched away from them. Hensley decided to fight back.

In 1971, after years of Hensley's tireless lobbying, the United States government set aside 44 million acres and nearly \$1 billion for use by Alaska's native peoples. Unlike their relatives to the south, the Alaskan peoples would be able to take charge of their economic and political destiny.

The landmark decision did not come overnight and was certainly not the making of any one person. But it was Hensley who gave voice to the cause and made it real. *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow* is not only the memoir of one man; it is also a fascinating testament to the resilience of the Alaskan *ilitqusi*, the Alaskan spirit.

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